1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

The hard work of cultivating the fields is abated only during the dry season — the winter months of December to February — though even during these months there is no dearth of tasks about the house which must be cared for, such as repairs of various sorts and, above all, rethatching. There is, however, also more time for recreation than at other seasons, so that throughout the countryside there are dances and cock-fights. With February, however, work in the fields must be resumed.

The Haitian farmer does not practice any formal rotation of crops, but continues to plant a given crop in the same field until the harvest becomes perceptibly smaller than in former years, when a change is made to another type of produce. Later, when the same phenomenon is again observed, a third crop may be planted, but sooner or later the land is "put to rest," in which case it either is allowed to lie fallow or is planted with cotton, which is not thought of in the same category as other crops, but is held to be a tree, and, like other trees that of themselves spring up in a fallow field, is believed to give strength to the exhausted earth. A field of this kind remains outside cultivation as a "fallen garden" for four or five years, and the animals are allowed to enter freely and graze in it until it has become a "new garden" again.

If a field is to be made out of hitherto unworked land, or ground which has lain fallow for several years is to be cultivated once again, the work is begun by cutting down the trees. The twigs are heaped preparatory to burning them, and the larger branches and the tree-trunks are used to make fences. After the dried leaves and branches have been burned, the field is cleared of small brush, and is then ready for its initial hoeing, which, according to the crops to be planted, is sometimes delayed until some months later. Usually, however, after two or three rains have cooled and softened land that has been burned over, work continues on it. The hoeing is

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

311
428
769
596

One other aspect of the apportionment of the land of an estate remains to be considered, the matter of leaving land for the support of ancestral ceremonies. There is no general agreement in Mirebalais as to the customary practice. It was first stated that four or five *carreaux* of land, which a man himself had "held in trust," are added to the inheritance of the eldest son, to be similarly held by him. The "trustee" calls in the other members of the family to help work this land, and the proceeds from marketing its entire yield are devoted to the support of family rituals, or used for such other general purposes as aiding a member of the family who requires funds to save himself from disgrace, and the family from scandalous gossip.

The practice of alienating land to provide for the worship of the ancestors would appear to be common in the southern peninsula and in the plain of the Cul-de-Sac; and one person, not a native of Mirebalais, told how he found it impossible to buy some land he wished to acquire because it had been consecrated for this purpose. Certain men cited examples of land which had belonged to the "old, old people of the family," control of which was vested in the family head and could therefore never be divided or sold. But this is land where the family house of worship stands and where ceremonies for the family deities and ancestors are held, something not at all comparable with setting aside workable land to yield a yearly income for services of the dead. The closest resemblance to this found in Mirebalais is when a man or a woman during life sets aside a portion of land or other belongings, declaring: "When I die, dispose of this and with the proceeds care for the expenses of my funeral and discharge these obligations which I leave you." Other persons spoke of land, which having been in the family for a very long period of time may not be sold, since it had proved to be extremely good, and the "will of the ancients" is that it never be alienated. Those who men-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

tioned this latter instance advanced it as a possible alternative to the custom found elsewhere in Haiti, adding that it was the duty of the living to honor their ancestors, and not for the ancestors to make provision to honor themselves, particularly since the dead can enforce the discharge of this duty by sending illness, bad fortune, and death to those of their descendants who are remiss.

To a very appreciable degree, what is inherited forms the foundation of whatever wealth a man may accumulate during his lifetime. Yet there are few, among the peasants at least, who do not seek by all means to add to their heritage, for among those folk the ambition to obtain more and more land is a dominating one. To this end the peasant skimps and saves, depriving himself even of his important needs, until at the proper time some choice parcel of ground comes on the market.

How does a man go about accumulating the funds necessary to amass property? Ordinarily a young man is given a plot of ground by his father, and the produce, as mentioned, is marketed for him by his mother, who saves the proceeds for him. When he marries, his wife takes over this task, and together the two strive to extract as large earnings as possible from his plot. In addition, a man may take a *job*. Such work, always paid for by the unit rather than by the day or week, is usually that of cultivating a plot of ground for its owner, and the amount agreed upon is paid when the field has been harvested. The young man at the same time can also cultivate his own fields and participate in communal labor. Another way of adding to the earnings of his fields is to help the large landowners on their cotton plantations. This work is paid for in kind with baskets of cotton, which in turn are sold to factors who come from the coast to buy both large and small quantities. A man may also increase his income by working in the cane-fields or at the caldrons when the sirup is boiled. Each

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[P.110]

9. Land and Work

There is a common Haitian saying which goes: "Pitit mangé, travaille youn pile" (A little food, but tremendous work). This is the way the Haitian peasant sees it. There is endless labor in the fields or in the perpetually eroding mountain gardens, on landholdings that are too small to give any promise of a better life. The rains that give life to the crops take away, year by year, the nourishment of the soil. Where forests or lush groves once grew on the hillsides, there are now deep, dry gullies. Where coffee plants, cotton, and yams once grew abundantly, there are now fields of stones. This is the heritage of the peasant farmer of today. Small holdings on the hillsides and in the valleys have become smaller through the years as the population has swelled and the land been subdivided. Three and a half million people must take their sustenance from that land. More than three hundred persons must share each square mile of soil. But most of Haiti is mountainous and formidable to agriculture. Two-thirds of the land area is untillable by modern standards. There is less than one acre of useful land per person. The best of the land in the alluvial valleys is held by large corporations producing sugar and sisal. Flat, arid stretches elsewhere are semi-desert.

In the small gardens the peasants grow maize, *ti mis* (millet), coffee, bananas and plantains, cotton, beans of various kinds, yams, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and manioc. In the delta areas they grow rice, and along the long coastline thousands of fishermen sail out in crude but sturdy boats to bring back fish fom the sea. Citrus trees, mango trees, and avocado trees grow wild; but they are fewer than in the old days. The Haitian works the soil and manages to subsist, but nature and history have not been kind to him.

Even less kind have been some of the chroniclers of the past, who have sought to disparage the Haitian as a lazy and careless creature who would

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

rather starve than work. An Englishman, James Franklin, wrote in 1828, for example:

> Experiments may be tried, laws may be enacted, and encouragement given, but nothing short of coercion and want will impel the Haytian to labour; and I have my doubts as to the practicability of enforcing labour in Hayti until the people have been better instructed, and their characters become changed.

As Franklin summarized it: "Nature is too generous to the Haytian; he never wants, and so never works for hire, as do free labourers in other countries."[1]

The early nineteenth century saw a flood of such bitter comments about the remains of the once rich and flourishing French colony of St. Domingue. The vast productivity of Haiti under French rule had made that colony one of the richest in the New World. The country was dotted with sugar mills, brick-covered wells, and warehouses; and carefully built brick aqueducts, irrigation canals, locks, and dams assured water for the plantations. In 1790, under the slave system, Haiti had exported 163,000,000 pounds of sugar. In 1826, a quarter of a century after the revolution, it was reported to have exported 33,000 pounds.

This falling off in production and exports doubtless had many causes, but one of the most significant was the Haitian's revolt not only against slavery but also against continuing the same kind of work he had performed as a slave. He saw not too much difference between forced, unpaid labor and working for any large landholder at subsistence wages. To the Haitian slave the inspiring battle cry of the French Revolution did not mean that all men would work together on another's man plantation and receive the same wages. It meant that every man would have his own garden to work for himself as he chose; every man would be a full citizen, with land of his own, free to come and go, to plant what he wished, to sell what he could. Despite long years under a colonial slave system, the Haitian still remembered a different way of life in Africa, where mass production for export was not the primary objective of labor.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the population of Haiti was not much more than half a million—less than one sixth of what it is today. There was plenty of land, and much of it had not yet been wasted by constant tilling and erosion. When the French were driven out, the Haitian peasant re-created an economic world of his own liking. The plantation system which had poured out sugar and coffee and indigo for Europe faded away, and in its place there sprang up an agrarian system which has continued until the present day. In the early

[1] [Franklin, The Present State of Hayti, P. 362. Cf. P. 351, Category 116. -- Analyst]

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

In the early
years of independence, Emperor Henry Christophe in the north and President Pétion in the south tried to stem the disintegration of the magnificent plantations. Christophe's measures in the region he controlled were sometimes stern, according to legend; but the plantation system and the plantations themselves gradually fell into decay, along with the aqueducts, the warehouses, and the sugar mills. For the Haitian had returned to a tradition of landholding antedating his enslavement.

Europe's loss of the Pearl of the Antilles aroused bitter words from Frenchmen and Englishmen for the better part of the century. They accused the Negro of laziness and lack of ability, repeating endlessly that only as a colony could Haiti ever be of any use to anybody. The London *Times* deplored the Haitian's unwillingness to work for wages, speculating that he had "no desire for property strong enough to induce him to labor with sustained power." In the United States, antiabolitionist enthusiasts cited the Haitian situation as an example of what would happen to the American economy if the slaves were freed.

The Haitian's reluctance to work for wages did not reflect an aversion to owning property, however, as the London *Times* supposed. On the contrary, it was engendered by his desire for property. The land was there and waiting, only needing a house to be built upon it, and to be cleared and tilled. The typical Haitian wanted not dubious, seasonal wage work but a farm of his own. The more ambitious peasant aspired to two farms, or even three, with a homestead and a family on each.

If a man worked hard and made a success of one plot, he could put away money and eventually buy a second. The additional land might be separated by some miles from the original farm. On the new ground the man would build another house and take another wife to take care of it in his absence. Known as *plaçage*, this arrangement had complete community sanction. A man whose energies and good fortune made an extra household possible was expected to make such an arrangement. It was not a new institution bred in the chaos following the Revolution, nor was it, as some missionaries held, an evidence of moral deterioration of the Haitian character. It was simply a persisting concept of West African life.[2,3,4] The woman who occupied the second or third household was not a concubine. Like the first wife, she had enhanced prestige in her community. She had authority and responsibility. Her work, her position, and her rewards were not essentially different from those of the first wife.[3,4] It is true that her marriage was not consecrated by a church or civil ceremony, but, ordinarily, neither was that of the first wife. Contrary to European misconceptions, such unions were true marriages in the sense that they had full sanction of the community.

[Footnotes appear in Category 116, pp. 351-357. --Analyst]

2; Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

a massacre in the western part of the Dominican Republic which took the lives of an estimated five thousand to fifteen thousand Haitians. The survivors fled homeward, and many were settled in frontier areas by the government. Even so, today there are believed to be some sixty or seventy thousand Haitians still living east of the border. Large numbers of Haitians, particularly men, migrated to Cuba in the years following World War I, in search of better wages in the cane fields. By 1931 there were more than eighty thousand Haitians in that country. But resentment by local Cuban labor and the onset of the depression combined to force the repatriation of great numbers of them. Thirty thousand Haitians came home from Cuba in the years 1936 and 1937 alone.

Solution of Haiti's problem of overpopulation does not seem imminent. The obvious answers would seem to be birth control, emigration, wiser use of natural resources, and industrialization. Since the country is predominantly Catholic, and since much social value is placed on children, birth control seems unlikely. And as health facilities become more widespread and infant mortality drops, the pressure will become more acute. Emigration seems to offer no hope, since neighboring islands and countries on the mainland give no encouragement. The Haitian may yet learn to conserve his land and to get more out of it, to stock his lakes with fish, and to bring more fish in from the sea. But this will not suffice. Nothing is left but industrialization, and that seems to be a thing of the far-distant future.

Nevertheless, the character of Haitian life remains essentially agrarian. The displaced peasant, whether he is now a hotel "houseboy," a taxi driver, or a cane cutter, dreams of returning to the land some day and growing bananas, coffee, and cotton that will make him independent. In far-off places such as Havana and New York, Haitians work and save money with the expectation that one day they will come home, buy fifteen or twenty acres of ground, build a new house, and live out their lives as decently prosperous *habitants*. The traditions of the agricultural society, along with Vodoun, continue to play a significant role in the life of the people.

One such tradition is the institution of the *coumbite*, a loosely knit coöperative work party of neighbors and friends. The word itself probably comes from the Spanish *convide*, or *convite*, meaning "to invite." A member of the group holds a coumbite by notifying his fellow members that on such-and-such a day his fields will require clearing or hoeing. There are several variants of the work gathering. One, called *carré* or *corvée*, meets at irregular intervals and only on special invitation. There are no regular reciprocal obligations in the *corvée;* the workers are

[6] [Simpson, "Haitian Peasant Economy," Journal of Negro History, October, 1940, P. 515. Cf. P. 352, Category 116. --Analyst)

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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same century in which Haiti withdrew. The yeomanry of Haiti in the nineteenth century was hence able to develop a traditionalism of unusual firmness and persistence.

This traditionalism, however, has had a high price. The economic productivity of the rural cultivator has not risen; it can be argued convincingly that poor land use, erosion, and population growth have meant lower levels of consumption for the common people in 1966 than obtained a hundred years or more ago. The rural masses, though overwhelmingly consisting of landholders, have been unable to break out of a stagnation that is economic as well as cultural. Such stasis has been based to some extent on the limited responsiveness of the rural folk to outside stimulus. But also important in maintaining the past is the national institutional system that took on its characteristic shape after 1804, and under which the rural masses still live. That system, the origins of which Leyburn has examined and assessed with such care, is controlled, as we have seen, by a numerically small segment of the national population that is markedly distinct from the yeomanry itself.

The nature and internal differentiation of the elite needs much more study, though it seems clear already that it is by no means a single solidary class embracing all but the yeomen. Whatever the structure of the elite, the relationship between the yeomen on the one hand and the real holders of power on the other must be understood if one is to understand Haiti. The yeoman is defined in terms of the elite; he is dependent upon it and subject to it. This is what is meant when it is said that the yeomanry, like the elite, forms only a part-society. Yet without the yeomen, there would be no elite. The elite live by controlling and taxing the rural masses, and find their sustenance and their power in rural productivity. Elite and yeomen, then, are bound together in unequal but interdependent relationships in Haiti as they are in other less developed societies of a similar kind. In such cases, the political role of the yeomanry is usually minor, and few opportunities may arise for the expansion of its political strength. If the yeomanry fails to increase its productivity in ways that enable it to control more of its own surpluses, its role in affecting national political decisions may grow narrower rather than wider, and this ominous possibility has become a worldwide phenomenon. It becomes more intensified wherever industry and trade grow, unaccompanied by parallel growth in yeoman productivity or in new and more widely representative national institutions.

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development of interior transport. The only passable roads in the Republic run from Aux Cayes in the south to the capital, and from Cap Haïtien in the north to the capital. Transport and communications simply symbolize the power that Port-au-Prince wields, since the same circumstances characterize all national institutional arrangements. Thus Haiti is an extreme example of urban domination, even though its urban population is a fraction of the national total. The consequence has been to keep most of the rural folk cut off from the apparatus that effects national decisions and shapes national policy. Haiti's national legislature, never important in limiting presidential power, is less so today than ever; at best, it had only represented the interests of provincial towns as opposed to the capital, and never the interests of the mass of country people.

The local military and judiciary officials possess the formal authority vested in them by the state, and their power is very considerable. Few local people would dare challenge their decisions, and the devices for appeal against arbitrary exercise of authority are few. Admittedly, at the lowest local level the *chef de section*—who is traditionally appointed by the captain of the military in the *commune* center and is himself a yeoman—is subject to some genuine restraint by local inhabitants. Jean Comhaire-Sylvain (1955:620–24) has argued convincingly that the people of a community are capable of insisting on democratic procedure in those matters requiring decision that come to the attention of local authority. But such decisions have little or nothing to do with larger issues. The yeomanry cannot directly make its wishes felt in national politics; and national politics are conducted almost without reference to the aspirations of the rural masses. It is precisely in the separateness of local life from the mainstream of national decision-making that the political impotence of the yeomanry is demonstrated.

Haiti's agrarian nature cannot be expressed simply by saying it is a rural and yeoman country. Haiti does not have a "land problem," as that phrase is conventionally applied to Latin America. It does, it is true, suffer from land shortage, inasmuch as too little land is worked at too low a level of productivity and must feed too many mouths. But a very substantial proportion of the rural masses owns land, or has regular access to it. It is true that most land is held in small plots and without clear title. But those persons who own no land or who lack land to work are proportionally fewer than in any other Carib-

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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bean country, and perhaps fewer than in any country in Latin America. The agriculture itself, with the exceptions now of those very few large-scale plantations in sisal and sugarcane, is adapted to small plots and is worked with intensive labor and few tools on hilly land. Compared with agricultural production, especially of cash crops, in most mainland Latin American countries, productivity is low. The yeomanry is conservative in its agricultural practices, and not ready to change unless the changes entail minimal risk and the gains to be realized are clearly demonstrable (Erasmus, 1952:20–26). Yeomen cultivate with three goals in mind: cash income from world-market commodities (for instance, coffee, sisal, vetiver); cash income from items produced for local sale and consumption; and subsistence. While they are heavily involved in production for sale, their crop choices and land-use patterns rest fundamentally on a subsistence orientation. All grow a substantial part of their own food, especially sorghum, maize, sweet potatoes, taro, manioc, malanga (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium* Schott), plantains and bananas, fruits and vegetables, and rice where possible. The land is invested with considerable affect: gods live in it; it is the ultimate security against privation; family members are buried in it; food and wealth come from it; and it is good in itself, even if not cultivated. While such attitudes are common in yeoman societies, Haiti's history of slavery, and of access to land through revolution, has given a special symbolic significance to landowning. Land is valued above all else and is sometimes held "uneconomically"—that is, even when the capital and labor power to work it are lacking.

Leyburn describes better than any other writer the history of land acquisition by the yeoman after 1804. The French plantations lay in ruins, never to recover, while early authoritarian attempts to restore the prerevolutionary economy under native Haitian leadership soon failed. In the course of a century, the Haitian people laid claim to their own soil, while population growth and the adoption of the French tradition of equal inheritance progressively reduced the average size of holdings. In spite of some plantation development after the United States occupation, most agricultural land in Haiti is still employed in small holdings, and "land reform" in the conventional sense—the breaking-up of large estates and the creation of a class of small landholders—is nearly irrelevant to Haiti's needs.

As today's yeomanry cultivates, so its womenfolk market. Nearly

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133 rains become torrents, washing away crops and soil. Brooks which run most of the year the Haitians dignify by the name of "rivière"; not even the largest, however—the Artibonite, which drains over a fifth of the country—is navigable for anything above a rowboat. The second largest "river," Les Trois Rivières, is only 96 kilometres long. Many of the smaller streams disappear into sinkholes or caves in limestone, veritable lost rivers. Even some of the lakes are ephemeral.

133 Most of the best land of the country lies in its few plains flanking
● 311 the mountains near the coasts, or extending like wedges into the
mountainous regions. In the northeast in the country back of Cap-
175 Haïtien is the Plaine du Nord; here in colonial times were the most
[134] flourishing of the French plantations, the palatial residences, and the slaves who in 1791 began the insurrection which ultimately led to Haiti's independence. In the middle region are the Artibonite Plain near the coast, and the Central Plain back of the Black Mountains. Eastward from Port-au-Prince, the capital, is the Cul-de-Sac; and in the southwestern peninsula is the small plain of Les Cayes. All over the country in French days sugar cane grew in abundance, making white men wealthy. The irrigation systems have long since disappeared; fertilizer is far too costly for use; trees have been cut down to make room for hundreds of tiny farms to support the increasing population.

133 Not even all the plains are naturally productive. Many of them, on
134 the contrary, are arid, sterile, and forbidding, covered with cacti and other spiny plants. Indeed, the most arid areas of Haiti, including its salt marshes, are lowlands.

13 Although the country is wholly in the tropics, the usual preconceived notion of the tropics does not apply. There are no impenetrable rain forests or jungles, no wild beasts, and very few snakes.
132 Because of the mountains, there are wide differences in rainfall, soil, and vegetation, within a short distance. Occasional hurricanes do great damage to shipping and the water fronts. Infrequent droughts sometimes last for two or three months. Hailstorms that damage growing crops are fairly common. Taken as a whole, the country has an ample but not heavy rainfall; coming generally from the east and northeast, the trade winds strike the high ridges in the north and there deposit the greater part of their moisture in the Plaine du Nord. By the time they have passed down the western slope and across the Central Plain they are dried and rarefied, so that this region becomes

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can seldom find persons disposed either to occupy or purchase them. There are some instances of proprietors leasing their lands to persons who undertake to cultivate them, for which they receive about one-third of the produce; but this is far from being general, and I imagine can only be accomplished by military men who have the command of troops, and who are thereby enabled to till them by working parties daily sent out for that purpose.[47]

An interesting side light is provided by a Quaker visitor, Candler, who in 1842 wrote that he was struck by the entire equality which seemed to exist between servant and master. Every workman was addressed in courteous manner, as "*mon fils.*"[48] On inquiry, Candler was told that the profits of planting were good that year, laborers were scarce, and it was therefore "necessary to conciliate all by kindness, or no work would be done."

A particularly grim account of the state of cultivation near the close of Boyer's administration (1842) is given by a Frenchman:

> The fields of Haiti are dead. There where under slavery thousands of tons of sugar were made, now one sees only a few crops and a little syrup to turn into raw rum. Lively growths of cactus cover with thorns the acres of cane, of fields, of pastures deserted by the hand of man; the cactus invades the towns, coming even up to the heart of the cities, flourishing in the midst of ruins, as if to insult the inhabitants. . . . On the one hand, no one cultivates with regularity, because everyone is discouraged by the thefts of cane and fruit by people without any moral discipline, and in a country without police; while on the other hand, people complain of being poor, and of not being able to devote enough money to indispensable improvements. . . . And if the proprietors cannot even make work progress, imagine the condition of the poor![49]

As the people grew individually poorer, the value of the land sank until it was useless for an owner to try to prevent squatting on his estate. Holdings grew smaller and smaller, in spite of the prohibition on sales of real estate in parcels less than fifteen acres. Good land might be had in every part of the island quite cheaply, much of it even from the government which had enacted the restrictive law. Any man not satisfied with his condition as a paid laborer might, if

47. James Franklin, *The Present State of Hayti (Saint Domingo)*, (London, 1828), p. 313.
48. John Candler, *Brief Notices of Hayti* (London, 1842), p. 37.
49. V. Schoelcher, *Colonies étrangères et Haïti: résultats de l'émancipation anglaise* (Paris, 1842), II, 263 ff.

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recognized that the really important characteristics peculiar to the peasant are his sentiments and attitudes, the intense attachment to his native soil and family tradition, which, even in the economic sphere, take precedence over the desire for individual advancement and gain."[51]

Haiti in 1804 was still a country of large estates, and Dessalines and Christophe strove to keep it so. Under the active generosity of Pétion and the passive indifference of Boyer after his Code Rural had failed, few great plantations were left intact. The recorded donations of these two presidents to their generals, civil functionaries, and lesser officers, are as follows:[52]

134 grants of 150 carreaux (about 450 acres).			Total: 59,300 acres.
176	35	105	18,480
639	30	90	57,510
711	25	75	54,325
2,322	20	60	139,320
8,000	5	15	120,000
			Grand total: 448,935 acres.

Haiti followed French law rather than British, so that the rule of primogeniture did not prevail. It requires only a moment's reflection to see that even within a single generation the thousands of small properties noted in the table would be subdivided many times, since a father apportioned his land to all his sons. By 1842 it is probable that not a single plantation of the size common in colonial times was still intact.[53] On the testimony of numerous government officials and commandants of arrondissements, it was estimated in that year that 46,610 small landed properties were under fair cultivation.[54] If the population at that time be estimated at 800,000, seven eighths of whom were engaged in agriculture, there would accordingly be about fifteen people (including children) to each rural property. But

A large number of small estates are left out of this account, which are said to be *badly* cultivated, or neglected. Taking the number of each separate

51. C. von Dietze, "Peasantry," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, XII, 50.

52. This table is compiled from figures cited in Armand Thoby, *La Question agraire en Haïti* (Port-au-Prince, 1888), *passim*, and Dr. P. Dalencour, *Le Sauvetage national par le retour à la terre* (Port-au-Prince, 1923), p. 18.

53. See Raymond Renaud, *Le Régime foncier en Haïti* (Paris, 1934), pp. 42–45.

54. Candler, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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family on an average, at 5 persons, husband, wife, and three children, we arrive at the conclusion, that the head of every third family in the state is engaged in cultivating his own freehold; a proportion of independent proprietors, such as perhaps scarcely any other country in the world can exhibit. The number of acres cultivated by these small proprietors, varies from 9 to 30; many of them keep horses, cows, and goats: they raise sufficient provisions of the bread kind, such as yams, plantains, and bananas, for the main support of their families; they kill hogs for meat, and they dispose of their coffee, cotton, hemp, castor oil, and fruit, at the public market for money, to purchase clothing, furniture, and other necessaries. The houses they live in, though poorly furnished, are decent habitations; and many of them have gardens attached, neatly fenced in with bamboo, or with logwood, or aloe hedges.[55]

If these figures are even approximately accurate, the majority of the people of Haiti had not yet become peasants in the sense of being landowners, for in the statement cited only a third of the people owned their land. Another large group, however, possibly a third of the population, were squatters, living on land which technically belonged to someone else but from which they were never ejected. The remaining third, excluding the town and village dwellers, were in the intermediate stage between hirelings and peasants. Some worked for a given rate of wages, but the larger number worked for shares of the produce on the land of large proprietors.

The crop-sharing system (Americans of the twentieth century call it share-cropping) of the 'thirties and 'forties was an automatic but temporary adjustment worked out in perfect disregard of the Code Rural. In general, two arrangements prevailed. By one the laborers worked in return for half the total produce of the estate, raising food for themselves in gardens provided by the owner; under the other they worked for a quarter of the produce, the proprietor guaranteeing to keep them in provisions. There was no general concurrence in Haiti at the time as to which plan was the more economical to the laborer and his family. Certainly both schemes were prejudicial to large crops of coffee and sugar, and therefore to the economic prosperity of the proprietors and the state; since this was so, the crop-sharing expedient was short-lived. Workers participating in it lived in the huts and cabins which, under the old régime, had been inhabited by their slave ancestors. As these fell to pieces others, cheaper and less soundly built, were constructed to take their place.

The crop-sharing system, economically debilitating though it was,

55. *Ibid.*

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have been gathered from trees which grew wild. Both men and women labor, with the work divided according to regular custom between the sexes, the men dominating the scene only in the marketing of coffee.

Nature was opulent enough at the beginning of Haitian independence. The wars had ruined irrigation ditches, sugar refineries, and mechanical equipment, but the soil was still abundantly fertile. But generations of farming by people without knowledge of fertilization or soil conservation have worn out much of the land. Trees have been cut to provide lumber and clearings for more farms; in the rainy seasons torrents have coursed down the mountainsides, washing away soil and exposing the earth to the rays of a tropical sun. Because the country is overpopulated every available acre is put to use, and to overuse, thus still more depleting the land. It is a vicious circle, for the next generation must extract yet more from the earth and so weaken it further. Hard work is the lot of the peasant, therefore, during every month of the year except the dry season. There has never been a formal rotation of crops: a farmer continues to plant the same crop in the same field until the harvest is perceptibly smaller than before. Then he changes to another type of produce. Sooner or later he will allow the land to lie fallow for several years until, by the action of nature or the grazing over it of cattle, it has regained a measure of its fertility.

The strenuous work of clearing fields and preparing them for cultivation is man's job. Since the peasants owned their plots it has almost always been done in coöperation by the men of the neighborhood. What on the American frontier would have been called a "bee" is known in Haiti as a *coumbite*, or *combite*, often carried on as an enterprise of the local *Société Congo*, the informal neighborhood group for mutual aid and fellowship.[6]

A man who has a large job on hand announces a coumbite for any day except Sunday, always a day of rest, and whatever other week-

6. The word "coumbite" was apparently borrowed from the Spanish part of the island, and from the Spanish word *convidar*, convey. In Colombia "convite" means exactly what "coumbite" means in Haiti: a gathering of peasants to work in common, or else a coöperative society for mutual agricultural self-help.

Professor Herskovits (*Life in a Haitian Valley*, chap. IV) describes the Société Congo in detail. The use of the name "Congo" indicates the African tradition, and is particularly noteworthy in connection with a kind of coöperative work which Herskovits finds particularly Dahomean.

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to regard the people as neighbors, their first impression is generally their abiding one.

And yet the land has its memorable beauties. To lie at anchor in the harbor at Port-au-Prince early in the morning and watch the long arm of the southern peninsula turn gradually from purple vagueness to brilliant green as the sun rises back of the capital; to see a tiny ship with its patched and colored sail glide quietly by on its way out to the island of La Gonâve, lying twenty miles to the west, like a morsel about to be swallowed by the open jaws of the "mainland"; to hear the morning noises drifting across the water, with a snatch of song or laughter in the air; to watch Port-au-Prince come to life, white and sparkling as the sun strikes it—this is the proper introduction to Haiti. Beyond the capital are the hills and mountains; if one will take the time, he may look back as he climbs and see not only the whiteness of the city, but the gracious sweep of the harbor, and the peninsula losing itself in the western distance. He will think without apology of a lesser Naples, and will not miss Vesuvius. Within the country is every variety of scenery: high mountains whose peaks are frequently shrouded in misty clouds; ranges of lower mountains ("*morne*" is the eloquent Haitian name for them) which can be melancholy, kindly, or forbidding, as the spirit of the traveler wills; dull wastes of salt marshes; arid deserts where cactus grows, spiked and hairy, to enormous heights; canyons, waterfalls, dried-up streams; moors, little jungles, farms; rich plantations of sugar cane, dusty stretches of sheer barrenness—everything, in fact, from majesty to complete insipidity. Rarely can one find such utter diversity in a small space as in Haiti. One might fancy himself successively on Egdon Heath, in an Arizona desert, among the Dakota Bad Lands, in old Saint-Domingue, in tropical Africa, in the Pyrenees.

The sad truth remains: nothing that man has done in Haiti for a century and a quarter has been worthy of the landscape. A few government buildings in Port-au-Prince are passable, and the city as a whole is not a blemish; yet not to have seen it is to have missed no great aesthetic experience. Elsewhere the towns and villages run the gamut from monotonous small-scale structures to mere collections of shanties. Great gashes have been cut in the forests by generations of earth-hungry peasants who needed farms. Much of the land looks poor; indeed, thousands of once fertile acres are now beyond any use at all, grown up in cactus, because of overuse and misuse for-

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merly. Wherever the overcrowded Haitians have lived since 1815, there beauty has had to give way to gnawing necessity which lacked either the imagination or the means to be sightly.

One can stand upon a morne and watch a rain storm rush down the valley, bending the palm trees in its fury, and think Haiti still a magnificent sight. Then one must descend the mountainside past rickety shacks and rocky fields, and the feeling grows that not all the kindly simplicity of the people is enough to lift the country from its dilapidation. As he nears the village, the afternoon scent of roasting coffee will delight him; but then he sees the squalor of village life and is reminded that three million souls are here trying to eke out an existence upon a small area of declining fertility.

Much in Haiti is picturesque if one can keep his mind from wandering to the conditions which lie behind the picturesqueness. Women stride down from the hills with great loads on their heads; aged crones, pipe in mouth, sit perched on the haunches of tiny donkeys with their bulging panniers; the great market square in the town is a scene of noisy confusion with hundreds of women and children, a mixture of smells, thousands of little piles of soap, candy, gewgaws, vegetables, gaping chickens tied together by the feet, shirts, canes, bolts of cloth. All the weary women, however, must trudge back up to their shanties on the mountainside when the market is over. Many of them do not see ten dollars in cash during the year, and their little children, with bellies bulging, give evidence of undernourishment. Without doctors, without even the rudiments of hygiene, they manage somehow to subsist, or else die, frequently of disease which might easily have been prevented.

In Port-au-Prince and a few other towns live enough members of the élite to make one momentarily forget the plight of the masses. The houses of the well-to-do are substantially built, if not often attractive. Their garden walls are brilliant with bougainvillea, their walks with hibiscus. Tiny red lizards (analis) make flashes of color along the walls. On shady verandas and in the parlors one hears delightful conversation, eats excellent food, savors the pleasures of civilization. The clubs of the élite are pleasing, their tennis is good, their dancing graceful. To be among these families as a welcome guest is an experience in gracious hospitality which can never be forgotten. Too soon, however, one must leave these havens of urbanity and pass through districts of the town which haunt the mind with their grim want.

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3. *Pétion, Boyer, and Inginac as Administrators*

Pétion lived very simply in the South, like a plain republican magistrate. He sat on his piazza, accessible to all his people. He had a quiet way of answering his opponents which did not make enemies of them. He made his secretary answer every letter that arrived, no matter how small; many were simply inquiries about the President's health. Yet the wars between Pétion and Christophe dragged on from 1807 to 1812,[1] draining the finances of the republic. Not only the crops declined: so also did most of the public improvements instituted by the colonial planters; so did trade; so did habits of industry. Everything seemed to conspire against hard work. The rich plains of the Cul-de-Sac and the Artibonite Valley were ravaged by fire and warfare; necessary equipment for sugar making was destroyed, the money for new machines and buildings was unavailable; and the men were drawn away from their land by military duties.

Inginac, Boyer's secretary of state, after the Revolution of 1843 had got rid of both the President and his secretary, wrote his memoirs. There are some revealing passages. Inginac reports that Pétion told him only forty days before his death that Boyer was a man of probity and delicacy, "but unhappily he is penniless; he is too [illegible] dominate, and he will bring unhappiness to the country if he does not change." Inginac cites cases to show that Pétion's prophecy was correct. Boyer in 1820 repealed the most unpopular laws, particularly those requiring personal corvée and the repair of public roads; but instead of taking advice from his cabinet on important economic matters, he frequently announced that he was president and would not be run by anybody. Consequently, according to Inginac, he made mistakes which might have been avoided.[2] Defending himself, the former secretary offers a clue to the failure of the régime—possibly unavoidable—by showing that the administration merely suggested, did not require, action:

"Have I not constantly, not only preached and corresponded about the necessity of making agriculture prosperous, but also given work at as high wages as the treasury could afford: Have I not created habitations on lands formerly totally uncultivated, putting formerly idle men to work: Have I not published at my own expense, although I directed the National Printery, methods for cultivating tobacco and coffee plants, of which I distributed gratis several thousand copies!"[3]

In spite of all encouragement which the administration could offer, agricultural production continued to decline, while expenses increased, and external trade fell off from a third to a half. The government had to borrow from the banking firm of Lafitte in Paris to find even the interest for

1. Hostilities between the two parts of Haiti ceased about 1812 because of the mutual fear on the part of Christophe and Pétion of Napoleon's ascendancy, and the threat which this constituted to the whole former colony. Their war had ravaged the plantations and removed laborers from the soil. Then came the War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain, cutting off many of the supplies which Haiti drew from both countries. There was accordingly an unwritten truce, with no further hostilities. A neutral territory of ten leagues between the boundaries of the two states was tacitly agreed upon: neither army was to enter it. This was the rich plain of Boucassin, once the garden of the island, now a wilderness.

2. Joseph Balthazar Inginac, *Mémoires* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1843), pp. 32, 34, 38.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

payments due to the French government.